

Leadership needs a rapport with the public. Churchill had it. Thatcher had it. Clarke has it — Malcolm Rifkind, page 12

THE TIMES

No. 67230

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 29 2001

2S RK 20p www.thetimes.co.uk



My great bikini survey

Mary Ann Sieghart **TIMES 2**

The killer wave

Coming to a beach near you

Page 7

Top civil servants to get £200,000

By Jill Sherman
Whitehall Editor

HUNDREDS of civil servants are in line for 50 per cent pay rises, plus bonus payments, taking their pay up to £200,000 in an attempt to narrow the gap with the private sector.

Next month the Senior Salaries Review Body will propose new grades for 3,000 senior civil servants to attract private sector recruits and halt the exodus of the most talented mandarins. As a result, many officials now earning between £42,000 and £127,000 are likely to get big increases in basic salary as well as bonus payments worth thousands of pounds from next April.

Tony Blair is determined to

range from £49,000 to a maximum of £87,500; the second, affecting 600 officials, should vary from £67,500 to £129,000; while the top band, with about 100 officials, should range from £83,000 to £183,000. The suggested maximum for the top band would represent an increase of nearly 50 per cent from £127,000 to £183,000.

All these civil servants will also be eligible for "significant" bonuses of at least 10 per cent, rising to 15 or 20 per cent in future years. An official on or near the top band maximum could earn £200,000, including bonus payments, under the new scales. The paper says 50 per cent of workers will be eligible for the bonus.

Those most likely to benefit from the overhaul include



Certificate of Authenticity

We certify the authenticity of the enclosed publication dated

29th August 2001

It is not a reproduction but complete and original newspaper.

HISTORIC NEWSPAPER

11 North Main Street, Wigtown, Wigtownshire, DG8 9HN, Scotland

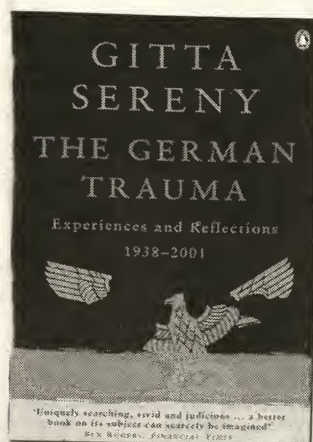
Tel: 0844 770 7687 info@historic-newspapers.co.uk



books



Napoleon and Wellington
 Andrew Roberts
 Page 14



Gitta Sereny has spent a lifetime exploring the worst aspects of humanity, and has faced many terrible truths. Yet she has never lost her belief in the possibility of redemption. She talks to Erica Wagner

Light on the other side of darkness

The girl is 11 years old. One day in 1934, she is travelling from her boarding school in Kent back to her home in Vienna when her train breaks down in Nuremberg. The German Red Cross, perhaps thinking to entertain her, finds her a seat at the Nazi Party Congress, and she is swept away by its fearsome pageantry: when she returns to school she writes an essay, "The happiest day of my holiday", describing it. Four years later, one night in a Viennese park in March, 1938, she hears her best friend Elfie reveal that her father is a member of the Nazi Party — which had been illegal — that he says Austria will be "disinfected" of Jews, while all around them in the dark she hears shouts: Germany awake! Jewry perish! Later, she stands beneath the balcony of the Imperial Hotel and hears Hitler speak. Later still, she sees the paediatrician who saved her life made to scrub the pavements with a toothbrush. Yet it would be some time before that girl, Gitta Sereny, rejected what she had seen.

Over 60 years later, in the comfortable sitting room of a book-lined flat in Kensington, Sereny is clearly still affected by what she saw as a girl — by what she failed to understand. "I remember extremely well sitting high up in this huge arena and these men — and Hitler of course — were tiny, far away and tiny. But their voices were huge — they had what must have been the most sophisticated sound system there was, even now it seems extremely well done. And it was just so beautiful. It was beautiful.

And I am sure that all the children around me responded as I had done. What is more frightening is that in 1938, when the Nazis came into Austria, I would have thought that I would have known better, and I was again overcome. That is really strange. That was after I knew of my friend Elfie's horror that her father had been an illegal, that she must never speak to any Jew again; had heard the terrible chorus of *Deutschland erwache! Juda verrecke!* Listening to that was probably was more frightening than anything else. Standing in that dark park in Vienna, where I had played my whole childhood. . . It was the most peaceful place on earth for me. And there we stood, just below the statue of Johann Strauss, and we heard these terrible words. All right, so I had all that — and then the encounter with my paediatrician. . . so I knew. For God's sake, I was 15 years old, I knew. And I think this is the question that we need to ask ourselves very seriously. Why do we succumb? Why do the Africans succumb to Mugabe? What is it? What is it in these individuals who have this hellish gift — which Hitler had — that pulls us? Because it persuades us. I swear to you, I think of this now very, very often."

That Sereny knew — as she says — and was still persuaded, is perhaps what has enabled her to do what she does: to explore what it is that makes what we might call monsters. *Into That Darkness* was her account of Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka; *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* looked into the

soul of Speer, Hitler's cultured Minister of Munitions and who, as Sereny wrote, "I knew well and grew to like"; *Cries Unheard* was her second book about Mary Bell, who, in 1968, killed two little boys when she was the same age as the Sereny who sat in the arena at Nuremberg.

Now comes the paperback publication of *The German Trauma*, a collection of essays — in one of which she tells the story of her childhood experience of the Nazi Party Congress and the Anschluss — that reflects her life's work in connection with that country, a country she believes has now changed out of all recognition. "This book is supposed to show that the German personality has really changed, which is an admirable thing. It is the only country in the world that has taken issue with its past. Don't you think that's extraordinary? Given the awful things their grandfathers did. The German young are really so different now."

Sereny, now at work on a history of Vienna in the 20th century, believes in redemption — which is remarkable, given what she has seen. Born in the Austrian capital to an actress mother and a Hungarian father who died when she was two, at 16 she fled finishing school for Paris, and worked as a volunteer nurse when France was occupied. After the war she joined the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration as a child welfare officer to work in the displaced persons camps in what became the American zone of Germany. From this stems the two aspects of her work: her interest in children and her interest in the



An understanding of evil and a belief in goodness: Gitta Sereny, photographed by Don Honeyman

Third Reich. In 1946 she attended the Nuremberg trials, and caught her first glimpse of the "startlingly handsome" Albert Speer. To the discomfiture of many, she has worked all her life to understand what makes such men as they are. It is that understanding, she believes, that can lead to change.

"I am interested in perpetrators," she says. "It is not that I am not interested in victims. I am sad for the victims. But what can we learn from them? That's really the question. Writing about the perpetrators, I really feel that one does learn from it. I wish I

could say that we learn enough to prevent. But I don't think so. I don't think any one experience or work or any two or any three, can make it so, but a collection of works — by other people, too — which investigate people such as those I write about — I do think it has an effect. I know it does. I've had thousands of letters. There is barely a day when I don't get letters from young people who have read my books and who say God, you showed me this and I know this now. Of course," she laughs, "they all want to come and talk more — it really is rather difficult! What more can I say?"

Sereny's laugh is warm and generous, and it comes often in our conversation, despite its serious subject. It comes often too, when we speak on the phone about the pieces she writes for *The Times's* books pages, when she pleads for more space and I usually give in. When I think of her, it is her laugh that comes to mind. Nearly a lifetime of considering the worst of which humankind is capable appears to have left her unscarred, and never dented her belief that change is possible: if some good can come of investigating evil, then there is still the space for laughter.

'I am interested in perpetrators. Not that I am not interested in victims; but what can we learn from them?'

I am not surprised that her correspondents want to talk further with her — her books are powerful in that they are dialogues not only with her subjects but with her readers and herself. If she appears to have a high opinion of herself, she has the same opinion of her readers — but her trust that they will be able to be as intelligent and thoughtful as she is has not always been justified, especially in the case of Mary Bell. Her evident sympathy with the woman Bell had become (and her publishers' payment of Bell for her time) gained her much opprobrium. Her ruthless desire to stick to the facts — that, say, Auschwitz was not a "death camp" — has not always won her friends. She is particularly scathing about the identification of Hitler's evil with the death of the Jews and only the Jews. She deplores the use of the word "holocaust", she says.

deplore it because what happened to the Jews was the worst thing that was done — but it has now become the only thing. And that is totally wrong. If one wants to be disgustingly numerical, one would have to say that Hitler killed more Christians than Jews. But we don't want to be like that. It's all wrong. But if we concentrate entirely on what happened to the Jews, we cannot see its parallels — and you know many in the Jewish community refuse to see such parallels because they think it diminishes their suffering. But it's not just terrible to kill Jews — it's terrible to kill anybody. This whole thing of the murder of the Jews — we must never forget it, it is part of history, children as long as the world lasts must know that this happened — but we badly need to accept it now as part of a terrible history, not *the* terrible history. I don't want anyone to think that I diminish it, I don't diminish it. It was the worst thing. But it was not the only thing."

Sticking to the facts is the only way to avoid playing into the hands of people such as David Irving. "Untruth always matters," she writes, "and not just because it is unnecessary to lie when so much terrible truth is available. Every falsification, every error, every slick rewrite job is an advantage to the neo-Nazis." She is puzzled, too, by what she perceives as a reluctance to confront the truth by those who seem to have the

most interest in it: "Why on earth have all these people who made Auschwitz into a sacred cow... why didn't they go and look at Treblinka [which was an extermination camp]? It was possible. There were survivors alive when all this started. Nobody did. It was an almost pathological concentration on this one place. A terrible place — but it was not an extermination camp." Then she sighs; and suddenly the fierceness leaves her. "The distinctions are important," she says more quietly. "But — death is death."

If her subject, Albert Speer, battled with truth, Sereny battles for truth. In this good fight, she has been supported for over 50 years by her husband, the American photographer Don Honeyman, who appears at intervals during

our talk, fetching this, copying that, pouring drinks, making coffee. Watching them together I say that the work she has done must have come at some personal cost — she has two children, long grown up, and grandchildren too.

She is reluctant to bring her private self into our discussion. Earlier I had asked her, as a friend once asked her with reference to her book on Stangl, why you? She answered with seeming lightness: "Why not me?" And then gave me a list of perfectly practical reasons (her perfect German, her social class, her not being Jewish) as to why she was suited to this particular project. "I don't understand the question," she said, or, "it is impossible to answer". But, having eluded that, she admits that yes, there

has been a cost — and that what she has undertaken would have been impossible without the support of her family. The emotional strain of writing *Cries Unheard* was great: "Sometimes, at the end of the day with her, Don and I would just lie in our beds, unable to speak or do anything." And there was, too, the price that all working women with families pay. Recently her son's daughter came to stay, and asked to see pictures of her father when he was a boy. When she saw the pictures — of Gitta playing with her little son — she was amazed. "What did you expect?" Gitta said, astonished. "He just told me about the nannies," said her granddaughter.

What is extraordinary about Gitta Sereny is not only her understanding of evil: it is her faith

in goodness. Perhaps this remains in her because she knows, from her own experience, that it is possible to refuse evil. I ask whether her early experiences might not have offered her a kind of inoculation against it. "It's interesting what you say, it may be true," she says. "The advantage is to reach this age and to have this continuity of thinking on these subjects, so that despite having had a perfectly normal life with a husband, children, love and friends — there hasn't been an interruption in the sense of concentration. So the inoculation, if that happened — and it may have — carried me, helping me to have the detachment that I needed. Gave me understanding and protection. I hesitated to put that story of my 11-year-old self

into the book, but I was determined to get across to myself and to the reader that I thought this spectacle was wonderful. I think that is important, at least to me. Somebody younger would perhaps feel, oh, I can't say that. But at this point, there's no reason why I can't say that I thought this was extraordinary. And that I, knowing how awful it was, stood in front of the Imperial Hotel and shouted *Heil!* It's incredible. Can you imagine me, shouting *Heil!*" And she throws her head back and laughs.

♦ The German Trauma: Experiences and Reflections 1938-2001 by Gitta Sereny is published on September 6 by Penguin, £8.99 (Times Bookshop, £7.99).



Sereny in the winter of 1940 — in her volunteer nurse's uniform — at the Château de Villandry, in the Loire, which had been turned into a reception centre for abandoned children